

Austin Sierra Club Political Committee
Questionnaire for City Council Elections 2011

Land and variances

1. a) Under what circumstances is it acceptable to grant variances to development rules?

It is seldom acceptable to grant environmental variances outside the land use code. Numerous tools already exist within the current code to allow developers to obtain greater height or FAR provided that they bring a higher level of environmental benefits into a project. Within that framework it is incumbent on the City staff and Council to make sure those benefits exceed the exceptions requested by the developer. Variances should be seldom granted, and only after careful scrutiny.

b) Does this change over the aquifer?

It does. Any of our environmentally sensitive areas should face a higher level of environmental scrutiny than say, a project in the interior of the City. This is true of any development over the aquifer, but I would also include sensitive riparian areas along the Colorado or remaining Black Land Prairie in that category as well.

c) Do you favor requiring SOS compliance as a minimum condition for granting zoning or site plan changes over the aquifer?

I do favor it. I would have to see a very high level of environmental return or land use mitigation before I consider granting a zoning change over our watershed protection lands. For example, I did not support the Wildflower Commons Project that would have altered the Bradley Agreement.

2. a) Will you stand by development agreements that have been struck with Stratus and Gary Bradley, or will you renegotiate them?

I have no interest in renegotiating these agreements. If a development is superior to existing environmental terms, I am willing to consider the case with an open mind. But, the bar is very high; I intent to keep it that way, and my record shows that to be true.

b) Will you oppose zoning changes to the Wildflower Commons tracts (identified as Slaughter 100 and Edwards Crossing in the Bradley agreement)?

I would and I have already done so. Again, I will look at a project with an open mind; I will never slam the door on environmental recapture or mitigation with a blanket statement of "never;" but I support the high standards spelled out in the agreements. The benefits of a proposed project would have to be exceptional for me to consider a zoning change within their jurisdiction.

3. CoA money has been used to buy most of the mitigation land on the aquifer; although

Hill Country Conservancy and other private land trust organizations help with negotiations at times, they generally don't have the money to buy large tracts.

a) If developers offer mitigation in exchange for a land use decision, should they be allowed to contribute to private non-profits instead of to a City of Austin fund?

I have always believed that the best way to control land use over the aquifer is to own the land. While on the Council, I have learned about conservation easements, development agreements and other tools for preserving our natural areas, and I'm answering this question with an eye towards those tools as well. I supported the acquisition of the City's portion of the Dahlstrom Ranch, but noted that foundation money came in all shapes and sizes. The Hill County Conservancy was able to cobble together several pots of money, most notably \$4 million from the Department of Agriculture and nearly \$5 million from Hays County. This, combined with the Dahlstrom family's generosity made that deal happen. I seriously doubt we could have saved that land for future generations if we would have relied on just the City of Austin and Hays County to come up with the money. I would be reluctant to hamstring the private non-profits in any way given their current track record. As long as those mitigation deals are carefully documented and supervised, I see no reason not to empower as many parties as we possible can. This is everybody's Austin and we need to not close any door on a possible conservation deal especially given the creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and environmental values of so many in this region.

4. a) Given the development pressure in East Austin today and in the coming years, what policies might you enact to protect Eastside creeks?

Conservation in Austin must be place-specific. We can not expect to apply the same watershed protection rules to our soft eastern alluvial soils that we apply to our hard limestone stream beds and expect the same results. The soft soils of our eastern watersheds are even more dependent on softer slopes and well vegetated riparian areas. I recently supported a staff-led initiative to craft a new set of watershed ordinances more suited to protecting our eastern streambeds, watersheds, and our tax base. We also need to take stock of the enormous recreational opportunities and responsibilities that exist around our eastern creeks and streambeds. The Austin Sierra Club is a critical player to achieving both of these goals, and I welcome any opportunities to have my office partner with you to make a difference for eastern Travis County and the Colorado watershed.

b) Would you support a bond proposal to buy creek-side land in Eastern Travis County based on the Travis County Greenprint map (http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/tx_traviscounty_greenprintmap.jpg) ?

We could certainly use more protected and on the Colorado River and on key eastern creeks.

Conservation and City Policy

5. a) **Will you support maintaining Austin Energy's goal of 35% of Austin's electricity being provided by renewable sources by 2020?** Yes.
- b) **What steps will you take to help accomplish this?** I voted for this plan and intend for it to guide Austin's power purchasing decisions moving forward.
6. **WTP4**
- a) **Do you favor suspending construction now?** No.
- b) **If the judge in one of the ongoing or proposed lawsuits rules that water transmission line construction must be halted, what will be your response?** I will follow the judge's orders.
- c) **Will you vote to appeal?** I would have to know more about the judge's ruling before making a determination about appeal.
7. a) **Do you support putting programs in place to reach the water conservation goal of 140 gpcd as recommended by the State of Texas, Austin City Council and the Citizens Water Conservation Task Force?** Yes. I voted for this plan and will continue to support it.
- b) **What steps will you take to help accomplish this?** It is my intention that this plan guide The City's water conservation policy moving forward. It is an achievable goal and I am committed to seeing that sufficient staff and resources are committed to the execution of this plan moving forward.
8. **Potable water is precious and limited. Other major and mid-size American cities are now requiring onsite capture and reuse of non-potable water for new development.**
- a) **Will you champion a city ordinance requiring onsite capture and reuse of non-potable water on all new commercial and residential construction? (Residential would be limited to Condo and Apartment buildings and new Subdivisions, not individual homes.)**

I would not support such a mandate without a careful understanding of the cost drivers involved. During my time in office I helped launch a Green Roofs Advisory Committee and have negotiated for onsite water capture during several zoning cases. I support the concept, but am concerned about setting up cost scenarios that may drive sprawl into other jurisdictions, most of which have more lax environmental standards than the City's. In addition, regional wet ponds can have habitat advantages, irrigation advantages, and can sometimes become amenities for the communities around them. I would need to understand all these factors better before I championed such an ordinance.

9. a) **Sierra Club opposes nuclear power, and the citizens of Austin voted to sell our existing 16% share of STNP. City Council voted unanimously against expanding our participation in the plant. Will you pledge to vote against any new additional**

participation or purchase of power from the STNP plant?

I always keep an open mind and am willing to hear about proposals that help us reduce our dependence on coal; however, I have serious concerns about the costs and handling of waste where nuclear power is concerned. I have not been presented with a proposal at this time, and what little I have heard about a new participation proposal seems too costly to warrant consideration.

b) Sierra Club is conducting a national campaign to eliminate coal-powered generation of electricity. What is your position on selling/closing Austin's share of Fayette?

600MW comes out of our share of the Fayette coal plant. Before selling our share, I would need to understand where that much base power is going to come from. From a clean air stand point, too, selling the plant it is not enough; there is no environmental gain of selling off our ownership stake so that another utility can simply take over, enjoy the cheap base power and continue to pollute. Austin is fortunate to own its electric utility. I remain open to looking at any proposals that are presented on this subject.

Comprehensive Planning and Economic Incentives:

10. Formula 1: Austin has spent tens of millions of tax dollars cultivating its image as a "green city" and recruiting high tech, medical and other green and low environmental impact businesses. Because of environmental impacts and energy waste, Sierra Club has opposed Formula 1.

a) What is your stance on subsidies for Formula 1?

There have been no City of Austin "subsidies" for Formula One, and I have never been approached to support any. Last year we repurposed an existing service line to serve that area. The extension request had originally been for single family homes, and to be transparent, the City included Formula One in that change of use. I don't consider a service extension request a "subsidy."

b) What is your stance on CoA efforts to attract related businesses, such as tire manufacturers, that counteract our efforts to be a green city?

I have no interest in a recruiting a tire manufacture to Austin, and would not support this type of manufacturing being on the list of target industries for business development efforts.

11. As our community, the people of Austin, began work on the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan, we were told to imagine our fair city 30 years from now, and then to describe what that vision looked like and what goals should be accomplished by then. Surveys collected from Austinites listed Aquifer Protection as a priority value the highest number of times (464 responses). This was followed by Water Consumption (389), Transit (362), and Mixed-use and Air Pollution (338).

We in Sierra Club are concerned about a possible "institutional amnesia" regarding Austin's commitment to aquifer protection and how that value is illustrated and ultimately implemented through the current Imagine Austin Comprehensive Planning Process.

Numerous official plans, policies, and actions have combined to steer intensive development off the Edwards Aquifer for the last 35 years.

- Austin Tomorrow comprehensive plan (still in effect);
- Austin Plan (aborted);
- City of Austin Smart Growth policy;
- Envision Central Texas regional plan;
- Water Quality Regional Plan for Barton Springs (multi-jurisdictional);
- Save Our Springs (SOS) water quality protection ordinance,
- Balcones Canyonlands Preserves for endangered species.
- More than \$100 million spent purchasing parks and nature preserves.

a) Will you support Sierra Club's efforts to shift currently located density nodes placed in aquifer areas to new locations, uphold our community's efforts to steer density away from our drinking water supply zones and faithfully express our longstanding value to protect the Aquifer as a valuable natural resource?

Yes. I support these efforts.

b) Will you support Sierra Club's efforts to have SH45 extension removed from the Imagine Austin Preferred Scenario Map so that we don't encourage and enable more development to occur in the aquifer's most sensitive area of the Recharge Zone?

Yes. It has already been removed.

c) How would you influence/modify/champion the planning process to reinforce these values?

Our City is engaged in a number simultaneous area plans. A Comprehensive Plan, a Downtown Plan, Strategic Mobility Plan and hopefully, we will soon see the recommendations for the new waterfront overlay. The challenge for policy makers is implementation. No amount of planning can substitute for good judgment and the ability to balance all of the City's priorities as land use decisions are made. My influence will continue to be what it has been in my first term – a common sense approach based on careful scrutiny and an active seeking of varied input.